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L E T T E R

T O A

F R I E N D,

U P O N

Occasion of a late Book, intitl'd,  
*Essays upon Morality and Natural  
Religion.*

EDINBURGH:  
Printed for G. HAMILTON and J. BALFOUR.  
MDCCLI.

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Printed for G. Hamilton and W. ...  
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A

## LETTER, &c.

SIR,

**I**T is a pleasure to write to a sincere friend. But my satisfaction is at present greatly increased, when I consider that true judgment and open candour by which you are distinguished.

I am to adventure to write (altho', I fear, not without presumption) upon matters of the last importance. But my boldness is encouraged, when I consider, that you are qualified kindly to point out my errors, when I am in the wrong, and to support my opinion when right. I shall therefore no longer suspend your curiosity, by any further preamble, but immediately enter upon my subject.

A 2

'Tis

'Tis a just and true observation, that the works of God are wonderful. And amidst these wonders Man makes no inconsiderable figure. He unites, in his make and constitution, the distant extremes of the brute and angelick natures, and thereby prevents a mighty void in the creation. It is not to my present purpose, to point out the curious contrivance and structure of his body, that astonishing proof of divine wisdom. I shall make but a few observations upon the more noble part of his nature, the principle of intelligence and action.

THE soul of man is endued with various senses, instincts, appetites and affections, and such like particular springs of action, and this somewhat in common with the brutes. But man is also endued with reason, whereby he is essentially distinguished from these last, and brought into some resemblance of the nobler orders of spirits above him. The vast prerogative, and rich appointments of reason, are conspicuous upon the smallest reflexion. By means thereof, we are not like the inferior



rior animals, confined in point of space and time, and to the sensible objects around us ; but we stretch our thoughts far beyond the birth of nature, and only lose them in the divine eternity, and we look forward to all possible periods, changes and revolutions of things. We can survey the various and distant parts of nature, and mark their particular order and elegance. And we can discern something of that wonderful harmony, which unites all into one grand and beautiful system. By means of speech and language (that inestimable gift of God) we can hold a correspondence not only with our Contemporaries, but in a manner with all mankind in all former ages, and all places of the world. By means of this noble instrument, the wisdom and strength of mankind are in some respects united. This is the source of innumerable advantages and conveniencies in civil and social life, and of the wonderful progress made by human industry in all the various arts and sciences. And hereby man maintains his dominion over all other animals, whether in  
air,

air, earth, or sea ; nor can all their strength, and seemingly inaccessible retreats, secure them from his power. Our reason performs a more noble, a more important office still. Man is not necessarily led to the blind embrace of every object that immediately strikes him under the appearance of good ; was this the case, he would be the most miserable of all animals. No, he has a desire, planted in his nature, of good and happiness in general ; and it is our reason alone, that searches at home and abroad, in heaven and in earth, and examines that object, or those objects, the enjoyment of which constitutes our chief happiness, and recommends them when discovered, to the pursuit of the above general principle of action. 'Tis here that we discover the chief province of virtue, which is the means of our happiness, or at least essentially connected therewith.

BUT I must now quit the present speculation and turn my view to a more disagreeable prospect. Human reason has a large province assigned her by nature ; and happy were it  
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for her, if she would content herself with the due improvement and culture of that. But a certain pride and fatal ambition, pushes her beyond her proper limits, to make lawless incursions into a territory not her own. And no wonder if she suffers loss from this her rashness and folly. We are but upstarts and novices in the world, and have scarce time for any thing but to wonder at the apparent magnificence, regularity, and wise disposition of things, whilst our knowledge of their nature is very imperfect. We attain the surest knowledge by keeping close to nature, carefully investigating her several parts, whereby, at last, we may arrive at some discovery of the general system. But this method is too painful and tedious, and does not sufficiently gratify our pride. We therefore take a flight to the clouds, lose all sight of nature, and build castles in the air. We form a system, not from nature, but for nature. And when we compare nature with this child of our own imagination, no wonder if she appears a monster indeed; because all her laws and operations, and even  
her

her whole frame, are quite incongruous to, and incompatible with our artificial system. But, in this adventurous *coup d'essai* of the force and subtilty of our own genius, as our danger is apparently very great, so for our misfortune, it may be very imperceptible, and thereby the more unavoidable. For in abstract metaphysical reasonings, our ideas are sometimes so very subtle, that we may either lose sight of them altogether, or, at best, they may not be sufficiently clear and distinct; or they may be necessarily connected with other ideas quite out of view. In all which cases our reasonings cannot be established upon a sufficiently solid and firm foundation. And yet, as the defect may be very imperceptible, we are in danger of being led by such specious reasonings into unavoidable error.

I have been led into these reflexions by reading a Book lately fallen into my hands, intituled, *Essays upon the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion*.

HAD



HAD that book been merely speculative, I had given myself very little trouble about it, however erroneous I had thought it. But as, in my apprehension, it entirely subverts all the principles of religion and morality, and gives an unbounded licence, and even a sanction, to every vice and disorder, I could not excuse myself not to contribute my mite to lay open the fallacies, contradictions and absurdities of our author's reasonings and sentiments; and to prevent, as much as lies in my power, their fatal influence upon the manners of mankind; though, at the same time, I am persuaded they never appeared to our author in this light. I must leave it to others better qualified, to enter into a full discussion of his scheme. And, as I confine myself to this form of writing, I shall only consider a little the foundation of morality which he pretends to establish; and perhaps more fully examine the famous doctrine of *necessity*, in the frightful and shocking view in which he exhibits it.

B

WITH

WITH regard to the first, I shall shortly observe, that our author lays the foundation of morality, and the law of nature, solely upon such principles of action, planted in our nature, as are approved of by the moral sense. He examines particularly the several modifications of this sense or feeling; of which it appears only needful to mention one or two.

“SOME actions, says our author, (*p.* 59.) “are felt not only as unfit to be done, but as “absolutely wrong to be done, and what, at “any rate, we ought not to do.” And thus he would give us an idea of what is meant by the words *duty* and *obligation*.

I own, the force of this reasoning is above my comprehension. For what is the effect of this particular sense or feeling of an action? Does it give a real determination in favours of this particular action? Our author does not, will not say so. A vicious affection may notwithstanding prevail over the virtuous principle. The superior authority therefore

therefore of virtue, and the reason why it is in fact to be preferred to vice, can never be discovered here.

BUT our author proceeds (*p.* 69.) to mention another modification of the moral sense, which has apparently more force, and promises effectually to influence our strongest principles of action. He observes, that in transgressing our duty, “we have not only the  
“feeling of vice and wickedness, but we have  
“further the sense of merited punishment.”

BUT from what our author says here and elsewhere, it is evident, That he considers this dreaded punishment as imaginary, and not real, and that our reason discovers it to be so: and if this be the case, sure no body will affirm, that an idle irrational bugbear is sufficient to establish a solid foundation of difference between virtue and vice.

THIS sense of merited punishment can never, in itself, be a sufficient sanction to natural law. It may indeed be a motive to influ-

ence tender minds, but is often too impotent to restrain bold offenders. Nay repeated transgressions gradually weaken its force, till it is sometimes utterly extinguished. That, therefore, can never be a proper security of the just authority of law, which even a repetition of crimes may destroy.

BUT I shall endeavour to collect all that our author has said upon the moral sense into one point of view, and try its whole force by one general argument.

'Tis the perception of goodness that determines the mind to any action. Now I shall allow moral goodness to be solid and real, and to be possessed of all the peculiar graces you please. But does it therefore always engage our choice, and influence our conduct? By no means. Very different things, under the appearance of good, often seduce us from the paths of virtue, and betray us into a quite opposite course. How then is moral goodness a law? Goodness real or apparent, of a very different kind, often engages our preference,  
and



and commands our obedience. In this view, moral goodness is a law only when it prevails. But then goodness of quite another character, when it prevails, becomes the law in its turn. Surely it will be impossible to discover here any solid foundation of difference betwixt virtue and vice. For 'tis to be observed, that our author rests all upon the affections; he leaves them to dispute the superiority among themselves; nor will he allow reason to bring in her needful aid to virtue, (*p.* 99. and 118.) when engaged in an unequal, at least a doubtful, conflict, with strong contending opposite passions.

It is further to be observed, that not only is the moral sense too weak a principle to give a just and commanding influence and authority to the law of nature, but it is a variable and uncertain one too; for by this scheme, morality, or the law of nature, is not founded in the abstract nature of things, but made relative to the sense, or mental taste of each particular person. Now 'tis a certain fact, acknowledged by our author, (*p.* 73.

74.) that the moral sense is often very different in different persons, and frequently changes and varies even in the same person ; and therefore this sense in itself never can be a sufficient foundation for natural law, which includes in it the notion of a constant and permanent rule, and which character of it is thus beautifully expressed by CICERO. *Non erit alia lex Romæ, alia Athenis, alia nunc, alia posthac ; sed & omnes gentes, omni tempore, una lex, & sempiterna & immutabilis continebit.*

IT appears abundantly evident, from the few foregoing observations, that our author has left the law of nature in a very hopeless and destitute condition.

BUT what would it have availed, altho' he had raised a beautiful temple to virtue upon the solid pillars of nature, and carried its height even to heaven ; since, as we shall see by and by, he had in reserve a fatal engine, whereby in a moment he would have levelled all the proud structure with the dust ?

THOUGH

THOUGH it is not my present design to establish a system of morality, yet, as our author has said so little in support of virtue, I cannot help throwing together a few materials, and making some observations, which may tend to explain her nature, and strengthen her cause. And for this purpose I must be allowed to make use of reason ; for I never can think that a faculty so useful in every other respect, will altogether desert us in the important search and pursuit of virtue and happiness. I shall confine myself, as our author does, to the laws of society. And the laws of society I consider as certain rules of action, the observance of which tends to the preservation, peace and happiness of society. And these rules are founded in the nature of the thing, the nature of society ; and therefore they are not arbitrary, depending upon the fickle humours, and varying tastes of mankind, but fixed and permanent, as is the nature of society to which they relate. Neither are they intricate and difficult to be discovered ; they are, for the most part, easy and obvious to the meanest capacity.

"Tis

'Tis surely no difficult matter to know what introduces disorder, distress, and misery among mankind, and, on the contrary, what tends to preserve the peace, and promote the good of society. I think the only difficulty lies in this, to know what is the authority of the rule, what the reason why we should observe it; in a word, what makes it law. We have already seen, that we cannot resolve this altogether into the moral sense, or social affections; and I shall now add, that the partial interest which each individual has in the publick good, is not sufficient to produce the force of a law. That partial interest is often but weakly attended to; it is often inconsiderable in itself; nay, it is in many cases inconsistent with the general interest; and the laws of virtue frequently oblige us to sacrifice private interest to the publick good. Whence then is a just and proper authority derived to the law of Nature. One would think it extremely natural here, to raise our minds to the great Legislator. And indeed the very notion of law seems to include in it the idea of a lawgiver. Thus

CICERO,



CICERO, in his description of the law of nature, observes, that *communis est quasi magister et imperator omnium Deus*. And, for my part, I cannot conceive how the authority of the law of nature can be preserved, if we keep God, the great founder of it, quite out of view. In this case the system is plainly broken, and the great support of it is taken away; so that nothing presents to the view of reason, but chaos, confusion and disorder: and from such a view of things, how will it be possible to establish a regular, permanent and commanding law? The Epicureans never pretended this; they acknowledged no law of nature; they made virtue the handmaid of their present pleasures; they studied immediate ease and tranquillity. If they had good affections, they gratified them in their turn with others, but they had no regular principles of virtuous life. And CICERO, in his *Offices*, gives the following just description of that sect of philosophy: *Sed sunt nonnullæ disciplinæ, quæ, propositis bonorum et malorum finibus, officium omne pervertunt. Nam qui summum bonum sic instituit, ut nihil*  

C

*habeat*

*habeat cum virtute conjunctum, idque suis commodis non honestate metitur, hic, si sibi ipsi consentiat, et non interdum naturæ bonitate vincatur; fit, ut neque amicitiam colere possit, nec justitiam aut liberalitatem, &c.*

BUT it is proper now to inquire how it appears to be the will of God, that we should invariably observe those rules which tend to the good order and happiness of mankind. I think here we may be allowed to assume, that goodness is a perfection of the divine nature. And if this is granted, I think it evidently follows, that God wills the good of the whole, preferably to the good of any individual. If he did otherwise, he would prefer a smaller to a greater good, and, consequently, upon the whole, would not be good, which is contrary to the principle assumed.

BUT the truth of the proposition under view, will further appear from an attentive consideration of the divine wisdom.

EVERY

EVERY where, throughout all nature, we may observe the beautiful and invariable characters of order and design. We constantly discover means admirably adjusted to attain certain ends. We perceive the inferior animals, directed, by an unerring instinct, to pursue, through a variety of operations, all these measures which tend to their preservation, and the greatest perfection their natures seem capable of. We, therefore, never can imagine that such a wise constitution should fail, in such a creature as man. Man is unquestionably formed for society; without that he would be compleatly miserable. And 'tis as evident, that the great end of society is social or publick happiness. And therefore the means necessary to attain that great end, must be agreeable to the wisdom of God. And thus it appears, from this short consideration of the goodness and wisdom of God, that the observance of the laws of society is agreeable to his will.

BUT, in the last place, it is necessary to prove, that the will of God, in this respect, induces an obligation, gives autho-

rity to the laws of nature, or affords a just and sufficient reason why they should be observed. Though this matter appears abundantly clear ; yet let us examine it a little. It must certainly be the interest of a rational creature, to perform those actions, which it is the will of God he should perform. Were it otherwise, it would plainly be a matter indifferent, whether God willed or willed not the action: in this case, the will of God would be quite ineffectual, that is to say, no will at all ; which is evidently absurd. It is a necessary consequence of this, that the observance of the laws of nature must tend to the happiness and perfection of the agent, and the violation of them must have the contrary effect. And, where this tendency is not immediately felt, it is a necessary conclusion, that God will afterwards make full amends, by suitable retributions. For it is ever to be kept in view, that we cannot give up our *summum bonum*, or happiness. Upon the whole, a desire of happiness is essential to our nature ; it is the first will, the great law of God. The will of God, therefore, in his moral laws, must ever be reconciled



conciled to, ever be consistent with this first and great law of nature, which philosophers commonly consider as a Polar star necessary to direct all our researches of virtue.

THUS have I shortly considered the law of nature, as founded in the nature of things, by the wisdom and goodness of God, and secured by such sanctions, as must make it sufficiently respectable, and give it a commanding influence over our conduct.

THE great end of this law, is happiness; a happiness that influences the strongest principle of our nature, and must therefore, if duly attended to, (and this is the province of reason), prove superior to those particular goods, which solicit their correspondent affections. I have indeed rather hinted at, than explained things; but I hope it is not difficult to pursue the hints given, and thereby discover the justness of the reasoning.

VARIOUS causes may render it difficult to reduce the principles of morality into a philosophical

sophical system ; but that will neither hinder these principles to take place in fact, nor to have a considerable influence upon human conduct.

I have not now leisure particularly to prove, that this is the fact. I shall only mention one authority for all. VIRGIL will be allowed to have understood human nature, and to have writ according to it. In the two following lines, he mentions the several principle and motives of virtue, in their proper subordination.

*Si genus humanum, & mortalia temnitis arma ;  
At sperate Deos memores fandi atque nefandi.*

He begins with the moral sense, the principle of humanity and social affection ; then he intimates the present inconveniencies of vice ; last of all he notices, as the great commanding motive, the reverence due to the gods, and the awful sanctions of law, derived from divine authority. When we thus consider the full system of morality, we feel its collected force, and must acknowledge its commanding influence. And even when

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we view a part of the system as connected with the whole, it appears with superior advantage, and strikes us in a stronger light. Thus the moral sense is governed and supported by unerring principles. Thus the authority of conscience (that quick and secret monitor) is rendered sacred, by the most ample credentials of reason and reflexion. And we see the noble ends, to which that inexpressible beauty, which is poured out upon the moral world, is subservient.

It may further be observed here, that the divine authority, not only gives force to the law of nature, by directing the principles of our nature to their proper end, *viz.* happiness, but also by strengthening those principles in their immediate influence, and inspiring them with new and vigorous springs of action.

For we are thus placed, as common subjects of a divine government, in a nobler point of light, and our social and virtuous affections must kindle at a purer and brighter flame,

flame, and consequently more easily prevail over our inferior principles. And this is what PLATO justly observes, towards the end of his first *Alcibiades*. “ If ( says he ) we  
 “ raise our views to God, and to the purest  
 “ light, we shall practise virtue ; but if our  
 “ minds are turned to atheism, which exhi-  
 “ bits a dark and gloomy scheme, we shall  
 “ practise the contrary.”

I shall only make one observation more. It plainly appears, that virtue is an active and vigorous principle ; it commands the soul, and governs the life ; it controuls, regulates, and directs every particular passion and affection. The virtuous affections themselves must be subject to its government ; and benevolence, when it assumes the shape of a parent or friend, must, in certain circumstances, entirely give place to the character of a patriot or judge. Even resentment, and other more unsocial passions, have their sphere of operations, under the direction of virtue. And the necessary consequence of all this is, that a moral character must relate to action,  
 rather



rather than affection, to conduct more than to sentiment. This is so clear as to need no illustration. However we have a very remarkable example of it in the character of SOCRATES. He is said to have been naturally of a dissolute turn of mind, and liable to head-strong passions; but he subdued these by an attentive and regular self-government, and by degrees acquired, or rather elicited the contrary good dispositions. And, on the other hand, it will not be doubted, that the best natural dispositions, if they are suffered to ly neglected, will lose their vigour for want of proper exercise, or be stifled by the luxuriancy of contrary prevailing passions. I am very sensible, that I have been but a sorry advocate in the cause of virtue, and said a great deal too little for the importance and dignity of the subject; and yet I have perhaps gone somewhat out of my way. It may therefore be full time to fall in with our author; where I shall meet him in a very perplexed and rugged path, I mean his subtle doctrine of *necessity*.

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BEFORE

BEFORE entering into a particular examination of his argument, I shall just observe, that from HOMER, and most other Heathen poets, it would appear, that the doctrine of decrees was both antient and pretty universal, but yet so understood, as not to exclude liberty.

AND, amongst the antient philosophers, the Stoicks, a very illustrious sect, maintained this doctrine as a fundamental principle; and yet they distinguished actions, into such as were in our power, and such as were not.

IT is well known, that they set virtue and vice in the strongest opposition to one another, and carried their notions in this respect, even to a degree of extravagance. SENECA, after asserting the doctrine of decrees in a very strong manner, (*lib. 2. nat. quæst.*); yet observes, that thereby the liberty of human actions is not taken away, and promises in another place to explain their consistency (*cum de ista re agetur, dicam, quemadmodum manente fato, aliquid sit in hominis arbitrio*). I am  
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not to enter into a discussion of this matter ; my purpose at present is only to notice the fact.

I shall now observe, that our author explains his doctrine of necessity in such a manner, as to bind, not only the human mind, but even God himself, and all intelligent powers, in an eternal and adamant chain ; from whence, by his own admission, such consequences flow, as it will be hard to determine which is greatest, their mischievous tendency, or the absurdities and contradictions which they involve. I shall then proceed to examine the direct force of that argument, which must sustain such an infinite weight. And this, so far as I can comprehend it, depends upon the truth of the following propositions ; That the mind cannot act without motives ; That the mind, when it acts upon motives, acts necessarily, and cannot resist them ; and also, That the motives are not only necessary in their influence, but even in their existence, and violently obtrude upon the mind.

IT is evident, without a particular discussion, that if any of the above propositions are false, our author's argument must fall to the ground. But if they are all true, his conclusion appears to be just, that the mind is entirely divested of liberty, and subject to an absolute necessity in all her actions.

BEFORE we come, however, to such an extraordinary conclusion, we must be allowed to examine the premises with due attention. And, I own, I can see no sufficient reason, to assent to the truth of the foregoing propositions; on the contrary, to me they all appear to be false.

THE first proposition, which is, That the mind cannot act without motives, will, upon very little reflexion, appear evidently to be false. For where two means, or two ends are supposed equal, there the mind chuses the one preferably to the other arbitrarily, and without any prepollent motive.

THAT



THAT two means or two ends may be equal, our author cannot deny; he only says it may be doubted.

BUT why should it even be doubted; the idea of equality is as clear and certain, as that of inequality; and therefore there is a real foundation in nature for the one relation, as well as the other, and the bare possibility of this equality, however seldom it may occur, is sufficient for the argument.

SOME philosophers, indeed, admitting the case of equality above mentioned, alledge, that in such case, the soul cannot act at all. But as this is asserted without the least proof or evidence; so it appears contrary to our clearest ideas and perceptions, to suppose, for example, that the soul shall be eternally frustrated of a high degree of happiness, perhaps of its *summum bonum*, because it has two ways equally proper and easy for attaining it. In vain do speculative men raise dust here; the light of truth is at once so simple and strong, as to be able to dispel all the clouds

clouds that can be brought over it. Our author is so sensible of the force of this evidence, that he candidly admits it. Only he alledges it can be of no great consequence, because the quality supposed must very seldom occur. But, under favour, the consequence is necessarily this, that, in the course of eternity, many links must be supposed to be broke of the fatal chain, whereby the connexion of the whole is dissolved, and the loose fragments must fluctuate in eternal confusion. And thus the necessary series of causes and effects is clearly and entirely destroyed.

WHAT is already said, is fully sufficient to overthrow our author's whole argument. However we shall proceed to the second proposition, and consider how far it is true, That when the mind acts upon motives, it acts necessarily, and cannot resist them. The reverse of this proposition appears evident from what is above said; for since the soul can act without motives, it must have a force within itself independent of motives; and,  
without

without determining the extent of this force, it may at least be supposed equal to the influence of considerable motives ; and therefore sufficient to prevent their effect, that is to say, to resist them.

BUT we shall consider the matter still in a further view. It is by reflexion and consciousness that we best understand the powers and operations of the mind. Now a motive is some good, real or apparent, that excites to action. But when such motive is acting upon the mind, we are intimately conscious of a power of hesitating, deliberating, and examining things with great attention and care, before we proceed to the action excited to. And the liberty of the mind is more conspicuous in this act of deliberating, than in that of chusing, contrary to what our author asserts. The only thing that may be said in opposition to this, is, that we deliberate by means of a contrary motive, equipollent to the motive exciting to action.

BUT

BUT let us seriously consider the state of the mind thus situated. We shall, with our author, compare the mind to a balance, and suppose it equally poised : in this case there must be a motive thrown into one scale, in order to produce action. Let us suppose the motive to come from without, then it will be easy to discover, that the mind, under the necessary influence of external motives, must often be in a fluctuating state, unavoidably tossed backwards and forwards, by broken and precarious operations.

THE motives, in this case, like weights thrown at random into the scales, acting by an uncertain direction, must exclude all regular conduct, and produce the strangest disorder imaginable.

BUT, as the necessity arising from this supposition is evidently physical, I shall insist no longer upon it ; but proceed to consider the case, where the motive of action springs from the mind itself. In this case, what is it that produces the action ? It is apparently



parently not the motive, but the mind itself, at least originally: for, upon the supposition made, it is the mind that produces the motive; which last is but an effect of a certain power in the mind, that acts prior to, and independent of the motive. Perhaps, in order to perplex this argument, it may be said, that the mind produced the last mentioned motive by means of a prior motive; but the question will still return, how did it produce that prior motive? And the necessary consequence of this is, to introduce an infinite series of motives, before the mind can proceed to any one action, and all these motives likewise in this view of being creatures of the mind. This is infinitely absurd, as well as foreign to the purpose. I find myself in a manner prevented from using any further arguments to refute the third and last above mentioned proposition, *viz.* That motives are necessary in their existence, and quite independent of the mind. It appears indeed a most glaring absurdity, that motives should start out of nothing, and begin to exist without any cause. We are intimately conscious

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that

that the mind is the cause of internal motives, and must also have the direction of external ones, in order to prevent the absurdity above mentioned, when these last were under consideration.

OUR author alledges, that it is inconsistent with a rational nature to act without view, purpose, or design, that is, without motives : But this appears to be talking very loosely and inaccurately ; for it is to be adverted to, that the mind is endued with two principal faculties ; the one a self-motive faculty, or power of acting, and the other a faculty of reasoning. They are different, but not inconsistent, for they are essentially united in man. We perfectly understand neither, and yet have a distinct consciousness of both. We can reason about actions without being excited to them, and we can enter upon action with little or no reasoning. When the mind acts in this manner, its actions will probably be irregular, but then it is under no necessity so to do. It may still act rationally, and the perfection of its conduct consists

consists in the joint and proper influence of both these principles. The first is the proper cause of action, the second gives beauty and design to the action. The first is however the commanding principle, and without its active power, the other would be useless and even hurtful. For if the mind should give way to every reason, so soon as it is suggested by the understanding, it would thereby precipitate itself into the greatest ills. But the case is quite otherwise; for the mind may resist the motive of action, till it is fully considered in every light; and when at last it proceeds to action, it does the same voluntarily, and not necessarily. All this will appear evident when we carefully attend to the operations of the mind. For when a certain motive excites her to action, she is not immediately set in motion. She pauses and deliberates, she examines all the arguments against the action, one after another, and finds, as we shall suppose, the whole sum of them, not of force sufficient to determine her to decline the action. None of these particular arguments therefore could be a

counter-motive to resist the action, since the whole sum of them were not equipollent to the motive of action. From this reasoning it evidently appears, that the mind has a power to deliberate, independent of particular motives. At the same time it must be allowed, in an entire consistency with this, that the mind, whilst it deliberates, makes use of motives and reasons; but then these are its servants, quite obedient to its commands, and by no means its masters; for we must be sensible, that the mind calls up ideas, and brings them under view at pleasure, and attends to, and compares them in the same manner. It may perhaps be further urged, that the bare view of the possibility of a counter-motive may be a sufficient reason to deliberate. Though this should be granted, yet I would ask, who is it that exhibits such views? is it not the mind itself? And then why does such supposed possibility, which always takes place, sometimes influence the mind, and at other times not? This certainly must be the effect of that liberty and freedom with which the mind acts. But  
let



let us examine this matter a little more particularly. When the mind has a general view of a possibility of a counter-motive to the motive of action ; then it deliberates and examines, one by one, the several reasons and arguments against the action, and dismisses them, one after another, as insufficient, till at last it finishes the deliberation, and proceeds to act. In this process of the mind, the least reflexion must make it evident, that the force of the supposed counter-motive must gradually diminish. This we must be satisfied of, by attending to the state and condition of the mind in this operation. For 'tis plain, both by our reasoning and our feeling, that, as the several arguments against the action are dismissed as insufficient, the view of a possibility of a counter-motive must grow weaker and weaker. And therefore, the motive to deliberate becoming weaker than the motive of action, is not sufficient to support the mind in its resistance ; which resistance is however still continued till the deliberation is quite finished. And we are often conscious, that this is not finished till  
we

we descend to very minute particulars, even in cases where we feel the motive to action abundantly strong. It must therefore necessarily follow, that the mind maintains its ground, by a secret power within itself, independent of the motive. It is needless to pursue these abstract reasonings any further. From what has hitherto been said, to me it appears evident, that our author's principles are so far from being certain, that the contrary are established upon the firmest foundation and clearest reasoning.

WHAT really creates any difficulty in this matter is, that we are far from having a thorough knowledge of the nature and essence of the soul ; and therefore we cannot form a perfect idea of that active power, with which she is endued, and how, and in what manner it exerts itself. We feel its influence, and are conscious of its operations, but are not able to discern their curious springs, and trace their secret sources. It is not then to be wondered at, if there is difficulty in answering certain questions that may be put concerning this noble

noble faculty, since 'tis plain that the whole of the case is not known. We are equally conscious that we think, and that we act, but equally unable to explain how we think, and how we act.

It is indeed observable, that our author's reasoning concludes with equal force, against thinking, as against acting. A power, says he, (*p.* 175.) to act without view or design, is irrational. And I shall add, that a power to think without view or design is as irrational. Now 'tis plain, that we can think without view or design. For if it were otherwise we could not think at all; because, if a previous view was necessary before we could think, then (such view being a thought itself) it must follow, that before we think, we must necessarily think, which is a contradiction in terms.

BUT it is now full time to proceed. And I am willing, at present, to supersede the advantages gained upon the abstract point; and (according to the excellent rule laid down by  
our

our author, *p.* 35.) I shall consider his conclusions, and try them by their true touchstone, that of facts and experiments. For, (as he justly observes), had this method been strictly followed, the world would not have been perplexed with many inconsistent systems, which unhappily have rendered morality a difficult and intricate science.

IN prosecution of this part of my subject, I shall follow our author in his own method. First he admits it as a necessary consequence from his principles, that the mind is thereby unavoidably subjected to evil, if the prevailing motive happens to lead to evil.

THIS is an objection of force sufficient to overthrow all his principles, and which he does not pretend directly to remove. Instead thereof he endeavours to make reprisals, by starting a strong objection against the scheme of liberty; which is, That an arbitrary power, supposed in the mind, may resist good motives as well as bad ones, and can do good only by accident. No man, at this rate, can  
be



be depended on, he can have no fixed character, but must be entirely a whimsical and capricious being. But how can such consequences be fairly deduced. Is not an active power compatible with intelligence? Though the mind can resist motives and arguments, must it therefore follow, that it will always act at random, and in consequence of a blind force? No, it will, at least it may, still act as an intelligent as well as self-moving being; and, though firm against the impressions of inferior motives, yet it will, if it acts rightly, bend its power to the persuasive influence of just and solid arguments. And thus, and thus alone, the mind can acquire a fixed and steady character, a character to be depended on.

UPON the author's scheme only, the mind must be that whimsical being he talks of; because it must be tossed up and down, backwards and forwards, by every trifling, every contrary motive that makes the smallest impression on it, since it has not the least power to resist any. At best its conduct can

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only

only be regular by accident with regard to itself, since this must depend upon certain motives, over which it is supposed to have no manner of power. Upon this scheme therefore the mind may very justly be compared to a feather in the air, which cannot resist the least impression, but is forced to perform a giddy dance, at the pleasure of the varying breath : whereas, on the scheme of liberty, the mind (if things of such a different nature should be compared) may be considered as a firm oak, which yields only to strong blasts, and collects itself again by its native force. And surely, in the common sense and estimate of mankind, that is a fixed and steady character, which maintains itself in an even tenor, without yielding to every transient impression ; and the opposite one is giddy and capricious. Very little repetition on this subject will make it evident, that liberty is consistent either with a regular or whimsical conduct ; but that necessity must always produce an accidental and precarious one ; unless we suppose the necessary motives of action to be ever ordered and directed

directed by the Deity; in which case the conduct ought always to be regular. Now it will not appear difficult to determine upon which of these suppositions the real characters in life are most easily accounted for. Thus we plainly see, that our author's observation is turned against himself, and instead of being a counterpoise against the above mentioned objection, it may rather be thrown into the same scale, and contribute all its weight to overthrow his principles. But it is further to be observed, and is admitted by our author, that upon his scheme not only is the mind necessarily subjected to evil, but God is the sole author of this evil. To remove this difficulty it is asserted, that the objection also meets the scheme of liberty; for even by that scheme God must be allowed to permit moral evil, which is much the same thing, as being the immediate author of it. This last assertion would seem to require such a proof as our author has not thought fit to give. I shall only observe, that it does not appear difficult to figure a case, in which it may be reasonable for one man to con-

nive at another's doing a bad action, which it was in his power to prevent. And it is still easier to conceive, that an immoral action may, by the wisdom of God, be so adjusted in relation to the general system, as to produce good consequences upon the whole; and therefore may reasonably be permitted by God, however bad it is with respect to the agent, and in itself considered.

OUR author, in order to get rid of this stubborn objection, which, like a millstone, must grind his principles to atoms, takes more courage, and cuts the Gordian knot instead of loosing it. He boldly denies that there is any such thing as moral ill, *p.* 205. and 206. He asserts, (*p.* 376. and 377.) That our conceptions of human actions, as right or wrong, as praise or blame-worthy, are founded on deceitful feelings, and are not agreeable to the truth of things, but that the Deity sees things quite in another light, as they really are, and without that false disguise.

THESE



THESE are our author's positions, big with the most absurd and most pernicious consequences. Hereby the proper difference between virtue and vice is totally subverted, the beauty of the one, and ugliness of the other entirely annihilated.

IN the estimation of God, who sees things according to truth, virtue has no praise, and vice no blame, there is no right in the one, nor wrong in the other. Thus the character of NERO is as unblemished as that of TITUS, and indeed it may be so upon such principles; for upon these the kindest office to be done to mankind would be, if the heads of all men were upon one neck, to cut off all at one blow, and thereby extinguish the whole species at once. But may we not here inquire, what means that generous principle, that prompts to climb with pain the steep ascent of virtue, to do the greatest services to mankind? Is it a lie stamped upon the human heart, by the hand of God himself? Why do we falsely execrate the oppressors and butchers of mankind? Every villain, every  
assassin

assassin may lay open his soul to the great  
 Judge of the world, and say, my hands are  
 clean, my heart is as pure as that of the best  
 of men. Even the perjured wretch needs  
 not fear the vengeance of heaven, but may  
 claim the rewards of the strictest sanctity and  
 truth. Thus all restraints are thrown down,  
 and an unbounded licence is given to vice.  
 The wicked may in every shape of wrong,  
 invade the peaceable, the just; and say, I  
 have assenting heaven on my side. And what  
 can the good do in this more than miserable  
 condition? Can they draw consolation from  
 their conscious virtue? No, they must look  
 upon that as a proof of arrant folly, and the  
 greatest simplicity. Thus religion, the aw-  
 ful guardian of natural law, is subverted, and  
 every tie, that tends to bind and bless socie-  
 ty, is dissolved; whence all must rush into  
 endless and remediless confusion. Those ter-  
 rible and absurd consequences, with the mon-  
 struous parent from whom they necessarily  
 proceed, must perish, or else the constitution  
 of nature, and the great author of it too,  
 must be undone. It is unnecessary, and even  
 painful,

painful, to say any thing further upon this subject, though it is of an infinite extent. We shall therefore next attend our author in a very curious speculation. I shall lay open his scheme shortly, and as faithfully as I can. He admits, That, according to the real truth of things, Man must be incapable of virtue, and no better than a brute, *p.* 188. and 189. At the same time he allows, That Man was made for virtue and happiness, and that therein the proper improvement of his nature consisted. In order to reconcile these contradictions, he asserts, That God has planted in our nature a feeling, or consciousness of liberty, which he calls an artificial, fallacious, and deceitful feeling: and that, by means of this deceitful feeling, we are fitted to act our proper part, *p.* 187. That from hence we have new passions, and new springs are set in motion, to make way for new exertions of reason and activity: whereas, if our conceptions were according to the truth of things, he affirms, (*p.* 205.) That an entire derangement of our present system of action, especially with regard to the motives of virtue,

tue, would follow. The deceitful feeling of liberty he therefore considers as a wise delusion in our nature, planted there by God, as necessary to secure the cause of virtue. And after all, he allows, (*p.* 214.) that reason enables us to unravel the mystery, and to discover this disguised appearance of the moral world. I have here given a short, though, I think, a just and fair view of our author's scheme: a scheme in which there appear as many contradictions and absurdities, as could well have been imagined.

THE reason of Man, weak as it is, is yet able to repel the cruel insult; and can call in aid, from all the harmony in heaven and earth, from every thing beautiful and regular in nature, in order to deliver the human frame from the sport of such contradictory principles. Since every where we discover the justest design, the exactest disposition and correspondence, what an extravagant solecism must it be, to place such difference and contradiction in that subject, where the finest harmony, the harmony of virtue was intended?



ed? We have formerly seen the perfect agreement betwixt reason and the sentiments in the moral œconomy. And that it is reason alone which gives the finishing stroke, and full authority to virtue.

BUT here a very strange scene is laid open. We are told, that Man was naturally formed for virtue, and yet we are told, that virtue is contrary to the true constitution of nature, *p.* 188. It is affirmed, That the due use of our rational powers necessarily depends upon our having certain false ideas; and yet that our reason can rectify these false ideas, and adjust them unto the true nature of things. In order to reconcile these contradictions, it is said, That God has given us a deceitful consciousness of liberty; and that this consciousness, or feeling, can promote a set of actions and operations, contrary to the true nature of the necessary system. Is it not too much to multiply so many contradictions in the human make? No, we must admit another still, and perhaps the greatest of all. Our reason is strong enough to detect and

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contradict

contradict that fallacy, which was yet a necessary part of our constitution, in order to fit us for the proper operations of our nature ; and to make up the peace between two irreconcilable contradictions. I cannot figure the meaning of this more properly than in the following manner : That God has commissioned from heaven a very extraordinary ambassador of peace, to reconcile two contradictions in nature, but at the same time has sent an armed enemy from heaven too, who gives this reconciler a mortal wound ; in consequence of which the two contradictions must necessarily fall by the ears, and in the horrid fray, the constitution be unavoidably blown up.

SUCH contradictions are painful ; but it is necessary to insist upon them. It is plain, that upon our author's scheme, virtue is but an illusion and imposture. However this imposture he indeed treats very handsomely. He says, (*p.* 210. and 211.) “ She is, in a  
“ singular manner, the care of the Deity ;  
“ she

“ she is set on a throne, and a peculiar sort  
 “ of glory is thrown around her.”

BUT then he informs us, that God has given us sense enough to discover the illusion, and to detect that fallacy; the persuasion of which was yet necessary to attain the end for which Man was made. Thus is the fair deceiver stript at once of all her artificial ornaments, and despoiled by Man of those ensigns of mock royalty, which yet God thought it necessary she should be possessed of. Our author formerly, as has been observed, had deprived virtue of the use of reason. He might, at least, have allowed the vain idiot to fancy, that she was a queen, and to please herself with an imaginary sceptre. But here he arms reason for her destruction; he lets in the light of wisdom, which discovers her kingdom to be but fairy-land, and herself an empty phantom, an unmeaning and formless thing.

I have already hinted at the many absurdities and contradictions in our author's scheme;

but it is proper to reflect a little farther upon the two principal ones. According to this scheme the constitution of human nature contradicts the truth and reality of things. Nay farther, we find in human nature two jarring principles, that absolutely contradict one another. The first is a consciousness of liberty, which, though contrary to the truth of things, the wisdom of God thought fit to plant in the human breast, as necessary to support the constitution. But there is another principle in Man, and of a nobler kind too, *viz.* Reason, which contradicts the first, and discovers it to be a cheat.

THUS the deep contrivance of God, whereby Man is induced to believe a lie, a lie necessary to the support of virtue, is discovered by Man to be fallacious; he sees the lie, and is no longer misled by it. And thus the wise schemes of heaven are confounded by human reason, and the great pillar of nature is overthrown, whereby the whole system must fall to the ground.

OUR



OUR author may attempt to get rid of these strange absurdities, by telling us, that Mankind will ever be more under the influence of the fallacious feeling, than of reason. Supposing our author's doctrine should have no bad influence upon the bulk of Mankind, (the contrary of which is, however, capable of the clearest proof), I shall at present only put the question; What shall become of these acute Philosophers, whose reason is superior to the principle of virtue? Whether shall they govern their lives according to reason, and the truth of things, or under the influence of that deceitful feeling, which is necessary to the practice of virtue? If they do the first, they abandon virtue, and if the last, they give up their reason. I shall state the question in another shape; Which of the two above principles contributes most properly and effectually to our happiness? If the first, then why has God unnaturally planted in our constitution a strong deceitful feeling, that misleads us from happiness? If the last, then why are we cursed with wisdom

dom that may defeat our bliss? and why is reason armed against our peace?

THUS reason and virtue are made contradictory principles in our constitution; whereas formerly all Mankind have considered, and most justly, virtue to be the perfection of wisdom, the commanding influence of reason, over the several appetites, affections, and feelings in our nature. Upon our author's scheme, virtue derives its strength solely from the weakness or inattention of reason. But how absurd, and unworthy of God, must that constitution of things be, which is founded only upon a falsehood, and must decay proportionally as the light of reason prevails, and be annihilated when it shines in its full splendor. Not to press any further this capital absurdity, of setting reason and virtue at eternal variance, I shall, for once, come as near our author's scheme as possible. I shall suppose his doctrine of *necessity* to be true; this supposition notwithstanding, it is a doctrine which, with regard to practice in every respect, is as if it were false. Our author

thor indeed supposes, that upon this scheme, the notions of right and wrong, praise and blame, and, of consequence, rewards and punishments are set aside. But in this he is refuted by obstinate facts, of which we have the certain experience. There is in the universe an established course of things, a moral order and connexion, which the notion of necessity cannot affect: for example, a criminal is put to death for transgressing the fundamental laws of society. This is no arbitrary constitution of Man: 'tis a law founded in nature, and which Man cannot dispense with. 'Tis therefore an unquestionable experimental proof of a divine moral government by rewards and punishments. And the fitness and propriety of this kind of government must appear in a strong light, even according to our author's sentiments. For if, as he supposes, a false sense of liberty will influence our conduct, and produce a new set of operations, how much more must a true sense of real good and bad consequences, be proper to attain this effect.

I shall insist no longer upon this argument, because it is established in the most convincing manner, by the ingenious Dr. BUTLER in his analogy, to which I shall therefore refer. And I think it will thence evidently appear, that all practical conclusions that regard the qualities, or motives of action, proceed upon the supposition as if we were free. 'Tis indeed extremely difficult to reconcile this with the notion of necessity. Nor know I any other plausible method of doing it, than by improving our author's theory. For when he takes away liberty, he substitutes a delusive feeling in place of it, which lays a foundation for moral conduct. Thus then virtue and vice are brought into existence, founded not indeed upon liberty, but something that looks like it, and performs what might be thought its proper office. Now when we have once discovered virtue and vice, why may we not also ascribe to them their proper qualities of right and wrong, praise and blame, and annex the natural consequences of rewards and punishments? I confess I can  
see



see no reason to stop short, but that if we allow the fallacious feeling of liberty to be a proper foundation for the real production of virtue, if we would give any true meaning to this, we must ascribe to virtue its natural qualities and consequences. Had our author explained himself in this manner, I would have had little controversy with him. In this view the doctrine of *necessity* would have been but an abstract metaphysical notion, having no regard to practice; and therefore might be abundantly innocent, provided it could be sufficiently inculcated, that it had no practical consequences.

It only now remains to make a few observations upon certain other matters thrown out by our author in the course of his reasoning. He endeavours to apologize for that part of his scheme, whereby he makes God the author of a false feeling in the mind of Man. This he does by observing, that our senses, in like manner, represent to us the secondary qualities of bodies in a false light. The argument from the one to the

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other

other can however by no means proceed, because they are things of a very different nature. Our senses faithfully perform their proper offices, and answer the good ends for which God has given them. Their province is not to discover the real truth of things, but to serve the common purposes of life. Thus a countryman, who believes the sun to be but a few miles distant, enjoys the benefit of that noble luminary, as effectually as the philosopher, who knows it to be removed many millions of miles from us. It belongs to reason to discover philosophic truth. By means of this noble faculty we correct the false report of our senses, and upon the whole are not imposed upon. But if there be a falsity and deceit in the consciousness of the operations of our own minds, in our intimate feelings and perceptions of things, we must be thrown into unavoidable error. For these very perceptions are the principles and foundation of all our reasonings, and if they are false, our reasonings must be so too, and that without any possible remedy.

ANOTHER

ANOTHER observation to be made, is, that where our author considers reason as capable to discover the fallacy put upon our nature, he is startled by a terrible objection that stares him in the face. As he vainly attempts to remove this objection, he would divert the mind by suggesting a mighty advantage accruing from this wonderful atchievement of reason, and that is a discovery of a future state. His logick, I own, is to me incomprehensible: nor can I see how any argument arises from such a topick, unless it be in this manner. Our reason, by such an extraordinary effort of it, discovers itself superior to the divine wisdom, and therefore our power may, independent of God, secure for ourselves a future and immortal existence. 'Tis certain, that our author's scheme destroys the strongest argument for a future state, that which is drawn from the nature of moral government. And, I believe, none who relish that doctrine, will thank him for an argument subversive of the divine wisdom and veracity. But at any rate, of what use could a future state be, where

our supposed gradual improvements in wisdom must, at last, universally counteract the operations of virtue, by annihilating its artificial sphere. In this case we might heartily join in the poet's exclamation.

*One day, one hour, of glorious liberty  
Is worth a whole eternity of bondage.*

I shall just make one observation more with respect to the moral perfections of God, that these, by our author's scheme, however he may affect to compliment them, seem entirely subverted. For upon his principles God is fixed by the same necessity, with other beings. And it is not conceivable how the Deity can hold the reins of government, and give a proper direction to all the affairs of the universe, when we consider all his actions as fast bound in a fatal and necessary chain; nay, God appears to be in a much worse situation, with respect to a moral and rational conduct, than Man. For by means of a deceitful feeling, Man is placed in a proper sphere of virtue, which our author too considers as the most perfect manner of acting,



ing, and without which he must be as a brute, only with the addition of some instincts. But as God is entirely destitute of such feeling, what idea can we possibly form of the divine nature? Consequences so much worse than absurd here offer to our view, that I chuse to avert the painful mirror, and shall notice one abstract argument more, which now occurs in favour of liberty. This fatal and necessary chain, supposed by our author, could not have created itself, God then must be the author of it; and therefore must be independent of it, in consequence of which he must be free. Let us view the argument in another light. Our author supposes the series of causes and effects to be infinite. Now an infinite series of causes and effects without a first cause, is a palpable absurdity. We must then be necessarily led to God at the top of the chain, as the great independent cause of all, and who therefore must be free. Our author has indeed given us the clearest proof, and most striking specimen of divine liberty, that ever entered into the  
mind

mind of Man. For nothing seems to be more so than this violent machinery, introduced by God into the human frame, contrary to the truth of things, whereby new springs of actions are produced, and a set of operations take place, quite other than could have happened, from the natural and proper course of the necessary system. And what idea of liberty stronger than this, can we figure ?

IF God therefore is once supposed free, all our author's arguments fall to the ground ; for they strike against the possibility of liberty in general, and therefore prove too much. And certainly if God be free, it is easy to imagine, that his rational creatures may be so too, as they are made according to his own ideas, and may be allowed to resemble him (though at an infinite distance) in the properties and perfections of his nature.

THUS have I shortly considered our author's doctrine of *absolute necessity*. I have examined the abstract arguments, and these all

all appear to be strong and clear in favours of liberty. But as the nature of our active powers is but imperfectly known, and abstract reasonings carry us up to a region, where the light is often intercepted by clouds, and where an adversary may find some obscure retreat to hide himself. I have brought down the system, and tried it by the true touchstone of nature, of facts and experiments. And in making this just and proper trial of the truth, our author's scheme appears in a form absurd and monstrous beyond all conception. Whereas, in the scheme of liberty, there is nothing violent and distorted, that scheme exactly tallies with the frame of nature, it has an easy and obvious correspondence with all her phænomena, and with the general beauty and design of the whole.

'Tis true, ill is not excluded out of the scheme of liberty, but 'tis not difficult upon that scheme to conceive how partial ill may be productive of general good.

WHEREAS

WHEREAS, neither by the scheme of necessity, can ill be excluded, and it will be very hard, if at all possible, to explain its subserviency to general good upon that scheme; in vain therefore would the Necessitarians appropriate to themselves the idea of the best possible system.

SUCH a notion, upon their principles, is liable to insurmountable difficulties. But the scheme of liberty is very reconcileable to such supposed system, unless our views of the divine perfections are extremely low and defective. This last scheme therefore lays the most rational foundation, at once, for sublime devotion, and virtuous conduct. Our author, in the advertisement prefixed to his book, insinuates, that his thoughts may be esteemed bold and free. For my part, I cannot admit them to be free upon his principles, but that they are bold, I believe, no body will deny.

BEFORE I conclude, I shall make one general observation, That perhaps it is our true wisdom



wisdom to study to know how little we know, not to suffer our minds to take an unbounded flight into the superior regions, whereby we may lose sight of nature entirely ; but to advert to our present circumstances and situation, to the present imperfection of our faculties and condition, and thence learn that true modesty, which (if we trust PLATO's sentiments) is at once a decent ornament to the soul, and its strongest guard and security against error. I shall here quote a sentence, taken from a very antient oriental writer ; *Secret things belong unto the Lord our God, but these things which are revealed belong unto us and our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.* The just and important sentiments contained in this observation, have been the ground-work of the finest philosophy the Heathen world can boast of.

THUS have I endeavoured to represent the consequences of our author's principles, with that freedom which a regard to truth, and

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the happiness of mankind, appeared to make absolutely necessary.

I have been indeed obliged much to contract my thoughts upon the subject, which otherwise would have carried me too far. For our author's deceitful feeling discolours almost every thought, every passion, every power in Man. It misrepresents every object, truth and happiness not excepted. In a word, it spreads its delusive influence thro' the whole human system.

IN this view of Man, therefore, the following description of the Poet can never be thought too strong,

*Man is a monster, the reproach of heav'n,  
A stain, a dark impenetrable cloud,  
On Nature's beauteous aspect; and deforms,  
(Amazing blot) deforms her with her Lord.*

WITH regard to our author himself, (whoever he may be) I am disposed to have the greatest charity for him. I believe, that, by some unlucky way of thinking, he has been led to espouse, as a certain principle,  
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the rigid doctrine of *necessity*, an error common to him with many great and good men ; and I own I am pleased with his honesty, in fairly, and I think justly, pointing out the strange and absurd consequences of that doctrine, which others have been more fly in doing.

I am not surpris'd, if this has perplexed him. And I think he discovers a generous effort to accommodate his scheme to the cause of virtue. He has indeed exerted his genius (which frequently shines with a considerable lustre) to subdue absurdities, and reconcile contradictions, and to make the best of the system that his principles would allow. But herein he has only given proof, how vain it is for any genius to contend against the force of truth, and the unalterable nature of things. I hope, however, the day will come, when with pleasure he shall feel the truth, contained in the following lines,

——— *Illic, postquàm se lumine vero*  
*Implevit, vidit quanta sub nocte jaceret*  
*Nostra dies.*———

WHEN I take a serious review of our author's principles, I am sometimes tempted to think, that his design (a case not uncommon) was quite other than what he gives out ; and that he either intended to explode the doctrine of *necessity*, as equally dangerous and absurd ; or, perhaps, by giving a strong specimen of the difficulties our reasonings are apt to involve us in, when supported only by the light of nature, his view was thereby to excite us freely and impartially to inquire, whether God had made any further and more clear discoveries of those things, which are of the utmost importance for us to know. In this inquiry, we might possibly find the reality and truth of such needful discoveries, attested by a providential system, running through all ages, and comprehending an infinite number of facts and circumstances, many of them very wonderful and important, and all directed to one great design, with such a surprising harmony and correspondence, as to exclude any just suspicion of delusion or mistake. By a system of this kind, quite within our view, and exposed



posed to an exact survey in every different light, we might find an agreeable repose to our minds, otherwise too much dazzled by the immediate rays of abstract truth. And if, at the same time, we should observe, the two great lights of Nature and Providence, issuing from the same source, (though by different ways and degrees), and agreeing and uniting in the same general design; then, and in this manner, we might at last get firm footing upon solid ground. And where the light of nature lets fall but feeble rays, the kind hand of Providence may direct our steps, and point out the road we should take. If this be the case, we may dismiss many of our useless disputes, and pursue the proper business of life, which lies in action, rather than speculation. And we may find sufficient and obvious principles to support us in a cheerful course of unremitted virtue, in spite of all difficulties; animated therein by the agreeable hope of arriving at a state of greater perfection in knowledge and happiness; to which state all our faculties, affections and desires, plainly and naturally point.

BUT

BUT I am afraid, Sir, that, by this time,  
I have tired you with a long (and I wish I  
had no reason to say) an ill-digested epistle.  
I shall therefore instantly relieve your pa-  
tience, and take the pleasure to conclude  
myself

*Your sincere Friend*

*and humble servant,*

PHILELEUTHERUS,

The Reader is desired to correct the following *Errata*.

**P**Age 20. line 22. place comma after the word happiness; and  
l. 23. place the point after the word whole. P. 24. l. 8. for  
scheme read scene. P. 30. l. 5. for quality read equality. P. 42.  
l. 19. 20. for repetition read reflexion. P. 48. l. antepenult. for  
difference read dissonance. P. 55. l. 3. for consequence, read con-  
sequent without a comma. P. 67. l. 6. for fly read shy.